



Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication

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AEJMC Supporting FCC's Proposed Rule Change for Media Transparency

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The Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC), a nonprofit, academic organization of more than 3,600 journalism and mass communication educators, students, and media professionals, is committed to “defend and maintain freedom of communication in an effort to achieve better professional practice and a better informed public.”

AEJMC would like to respond to the October 27, 2011 Federal Communications Commission Order on Reconsideration and Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking in connection with “the Matter of Standardized and Enhanced Disclosure Requirements for Television Broadcast Licensee Public Interest Obligations.”

AEJMC supports the FCC's important proposed rule change because this would bring closer to reality broadcasters' transparency in fulfilling their “public-interest obligations” to communities. The rule change would exponentially expand the public's access to the broadcasters' “public-inspection files,” now on paper, by requiring them to make them available online. AEJMC applauds the FCC for its overdue effort to “modernize the way television broadcasters inform the public about how they are serving their communities.”

As Steven Waldman, the lead author of the FCC report titled “Information Needs of Communities: The Changing Media Landscape in a Broadband Age,” cogently noted in his *Columbia Journalism Review* article of December 29, 2011, the proposed FCC rule change mandating online access will impose little additional burden to broadcasters, since broadcasters are already required to assemble these materials.

From journalism and mass communication educators' perspective, AEJMC believes that putting these political files online would enable educators and researchers to better teach and research how the public-owned airwaves have been used for political advertising. Equally important, investigating the broadcasters' “pay for play” arrangements would be much easier if these records are included in online public files.

AEJMC disagrees with broadcasters that the proposed FCC disclosure regulations could create problems for them in terms of additional cost and manpower from compliance with the regulations. Their objections seem to be more transparency-averse than cost-motivated. For putting the public inspection data online at the FCC would entail little additional cost for the broadcasters.

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Professor Jeremy Harris Lipschultz, director of the University of Nebraska-Omaha School of Communication, who for more than twenty years has been sending students in his Media Regulation and Freedom course to inspect local public files, recently said, “Some operations are downright hostile about the current obligation of public inspection during regular office hours.”

In conclusion, AEJMC urges the FCC to err on the side of more transparency, not less, on the part of broadcasters’ obligations for public-file inspections. This is all the more compelling than ever, given that off-line information about the broadcasters’ records for operating TV and radio stations for the “public interest, convenience, and necessity” is more often a case of “practical obscurity.” This should no longer be allowed in the Internet era. The media transparency proposal of the FCC would be one effective way to tackle the physical inertia inherent in the files in the broadcasters’ file cabinets.

To leave a comment about the proposed rule change on the FCC site, go here:

<http://fjallfoss.fcc.gov/ecfs/upload/display?z=yx8a4>

(Enter proceeding number 00-168)

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